



ZEN LEADER

From Tension to Extension: 3 Laws of Energy Management

LEAD THE WAY

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3 Laws of Energy Management

...to give you energy for the journey

1. Rhythm, not relentless

For more than 100 years and the work of Yerkes and Dodson, we've known that between under-stimulation (which makes us lazy) too much stress (which burns us out) is an optimal performance zone. But, to use an analogy to water, this in-between place is not lukewarm sameness, but rather the alteration of hot and cold. Drive and recover. Stretch and renew. This rhythmic alteration of stimulation keeps the nervous system sharp and expands our capacity.

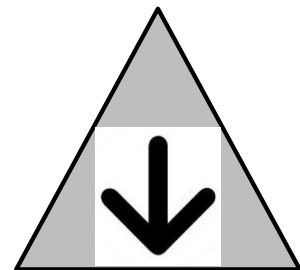
Just as our heart runs on a sustainable rhythm of tension and release, so we want to create in each day a sustainable rhythm of stretch and renewal. Best practice in this regard is a mix of 30 minutes/day of a renewing activity plus mini-breaks as short as 2 minutes every 90 minutes or so to refresh our system.



Ideas for mini-breaks and renewing practices from Chapter 2 (flip #2) of [The Zen Leader](#) are given at the end.

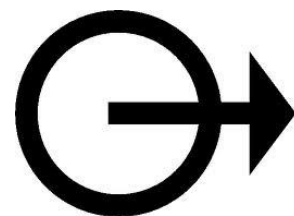
2. Down, not up

Calm down, settle down, quiet down – it's in our language to think of down as the direction of our most stable, peaceful energy. Indeed, as we bring breath down to our lower abdomen – the center, or *hara* as it's called in Japanese – the more resilient we become physically, emotionally and psychologically. As such, breathing exercises that let the breath settle down into the *hara*, or Zen meditation where each exhale is sent down into the *hara*, are particularly valuable as parts of an energy management practice.



3. Out, not in

Rather than being stuck to a self who is reacting to forces bearing in on it, we manage our energy much more productively by extending it out from our center into the world as a creative force. To get a feel for this, keep your shoulders relaxed and your arms soft, and run the back of your right index finger along the underside of your left arm and out through the fingertips of your left hand. Let the left arm keep extending beyond its fingertips, as if it could telescope endlessly outward. Do the same on the other side, extending your right arm. Now bring that extension through both arms at the same time, softening your torso and letting any tension in the middle ooze out through your naturally extended fingertips. Direct that energy toward what you intend and it becomes a creative force.



Flip #2: Tension to Extension

Tension flips into extension when we have enough awareness and energy to let go of what's stuck. We can do this by punctuating work activities with mini-recovery breaks and, once or twice a day, engaging in a physically renewing practice. You can use the Down, Not Up Mini Break whenever you need to get unstuck from your head and centered in *hara*. Other mini-break ideas are also listed, as well as a host of longer term practices that may become part of your personal prescription for building and sustaining your energy over time.

Down, Not Up Mini Break

- Stand comfortably, feet shoulder-width apart. Shrug your **shoulders** as high up toward your ears as possible, and then drop them, as in Figure 2-1a. Repeat several times; notice that you automatically exhale as you drop your shoulders.
- Loosen up your **face**. Do this by opening your jaw as wide as possible and closing it a few times; moving your lower jaw laterally back and forth a couple times, opening your eyes as wide as possible and closing them a couple of times; make a few crazy faces (Figure 2-1b).
- Loosen up your **neck**. Stretching your neck long, lay your left ear over toward your left shoulder. Roll your head forward and around like a free-swinging pendulum until your right ear is toward your right shoulder (see Figure 2-1c). Stretch your neck long, and roll back the other way. Repeat a few times.
- Shake out any tension in your **arms** and hands. Standing on one foot, shake out tension in your **legs** one at a time. Retuning to a still position, bring your awareness to your breath and do several, ever-slower inhales and exhales of the **Centering breath exercise** (Figure 2-1 d, or see Chapter 1 exercises if you need a refresher).
- Stand, breathing naturally to and from your *hara* (Figure 2-1e).

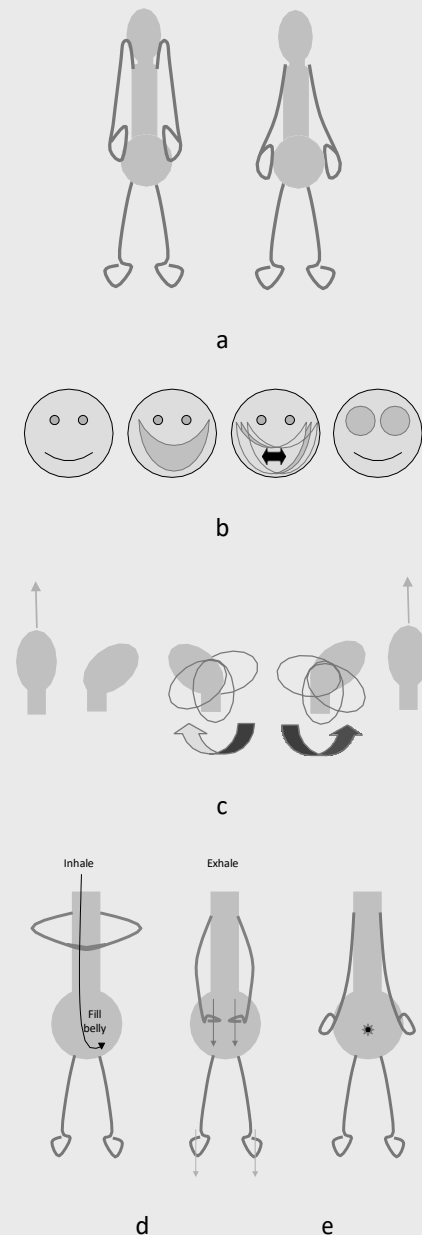


Figure 2-1

Other Ideas for Mini Breaks

When you need a 2-minute break you might try one of these, or make up your own:

- Get outside
- Breathe a few sighs of relief
- Massage your eyes
- Get a drink of water and/or a 100-150 calorie snack
- Stretch
- Sing, use your voice to make simple vowel sounds: ah, oh, etc., yell!
- Shake out tension
- Kick off your shoes and massage your feet, pressing on the soles with your thumbs, and opening the bridge of the foot like a fan
- Take a brief walk
- Listen to a piece of music, move to a piece of music, play a piece of music if you can
- Splash warm or cool water on your face
- Move away from your desk, go talk to someone

Ideas for Practice

Depending on what you enjoy or need, work some of these into your day or week, or come up with similar ideas of your own. In chapter 5, you'll see each column of ideas relates to a specific energy pattern.

To speed up or sharply focus your energy:	To slow down or stabilize your energy:	To brighten or lighten up your energy	To open up or be more present in your energy
Running Karate Weightlifting Cardio machine (hard and fast) Kendo, sword work Bicycling (hard and fast) Aggressive sports Skiing (hard and fast) Tennis Things done with cutting, sharp motions	Walking Ballet, formal dance Yoga Meditation Dressage Ceramics Housecleaning Organizing a space Woodworking Needlepoint Things done step-by-step	Latin, Swing-era ballroom dance Aikido Golf (the swing) Skating, rollerblading Swimming Bicycling (slow and easy) Skiing (slow and easy) Weaving Juggling Team sports (more fun than competitive)	Tai Chi, Chi Kung Meditation (flow state, Samadhi) Sailing Hangliding Scuba diving Snorkeling Photography (in the moment) Being out in nature Things that stimulate the senses